1: Tew E-4 (no date) 1950 FT7 Yao FT7

Land Tenure

The rules governing land tenure were those which would be expected of a society which suffered from no land shortage. A man was entitled to as much land as he could cultivate, the limitation being that he should consult the headman as to his neighbours' boundaries. Abandoned gardens could only be taken up with the permission of the original cultivator.[1]

MAIN CULTURAL FEATURES

Religion

The Yao are largely Islamized. Codrington remarked that the perpetuation of this faith was distinctly antagonistic to British influence, and it received considerable attention from chiefs and headmen. Schools for the instruction of youth in reading and writing Swahili in Arabic characters were established in nearly every village, where also prayers were made at regular intervals in the day. The Moslem fasts and feasts were also observed, and the Yao were not inclined to embrace Christianity.[2] Their conversion to Islam did not take place till the nineteenth century, long after their first introduction to the Arab traders at Kilwa and Zanzibar, although they had adopted Swahili modes of dress much earlier.[3]

According to Hetherwick, Islam is strongest on the lake shore and on the east border of Nyasaland, chiefly round the old slave-trade centres. Makanjira's on the south-east side of the lake, and Domira Bay on the west, were the centres of Moslem propaganda. The Moslem population around Zomba and Blantyre consists mainly of Yao men, who have built themselves mosques in their own villages, or use the large mosques of Indian Moslem merchants. In the west districts, lower Shire, Ruo, central Shire, Lilongwe, Fort Manning, the Moslem population does not total more than 732. In the districts round Fort Johnston and Kotakota, the Moslems are one-ninth of the total population, while in Zomba district they number one-fifth.[4]

The Yao pagan religion was a form of ancestor worship. Apart from diviners and medicine men, there was no regular priestly profession. Intercession with the ancestors was performed by the chief, on behalf of the chiefdom, by the headman on behalf of the village, and by the head of the matrilineal kin for his dependents.[5] A man was qualified to approach his ancestors individually only if he had been initiated and had a house of his own.[6]

Some of the ritual duties of the chief have already been mentioned. When his people were visited by drought or epidemic, or when he fixed the day for the beginning of the millet harvest, he made an offering of flour and of beer poured into a pot in the ground at the grave of a dead chief. The village headman made similar offerings to the spirit of his dead predecessor. The spirits of the dead Nyanja chiefs, ousted by the Yao invasion, were regarded as still powerful in the homeland of their people. For instance, Kangomba, whose shrine was on Mount Soche, used to be appealed to for rain, and on the principle that the most appropriate mediator between a dead man and the living is a descendant of the former, the Yao chief, Kapeni, when he wished to propitiate

[1] Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, pp. 177–9; Stannus, 2, 1923, p. 280.
[2] Codrington, 1898, p. 316; see also Maples, 3, 1893.
[3] Young, T. C., 4, 1932, p. 37.
[4] Hetherwick, 4, 1927, p. 127.
[5] Werner, 1906, p. 270; Stannus, 4, 1922, p. 311.
[6] Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, p. 63.

1: Tew . E-4 (no date) 1950 FT7 Yao FT7

Kangomba, used to persuade Nyanja to help in the sacrificial rite. When Kapeni in turn fled to Mount Soche from the Ngoni, and died there, the Yao addressed their offerings to him, not to Kangomba.[1] The word *Mulungu* has sometimes been interpreted to mean Supreme Being, God, Creator, but among the Yao it seems not to have a personal connotation. It was used to describe the agent in any mysterious event,[2] or the place where the ancestor spirits (*masoka*) were supposed to dwell. Daily life was full of acts of respect towards the ancestors, who were regarded as jealous of the living, and requiring constant propitiation.[3]

Sorcery

Accusations of witchcraft and measures for dealing with it play a dominant role in Yao social life. With certain exceptions nearly all diseases and deaths are thought to be caused by sorcery. The exceptional causes are: the hand of God, old age, the transgression of certain taboos, and battle wounds. If sorcery is suspected the relatives of the sick or dead man consult the diviner to identify the offender.

Yao (in common with the Maravi and many peoples of Central Africa) believe that sorcerers have a craving for human flesh, which they satisfy by killing with magic the victims of their malice and hatred. They acquire their magical powers by an apprenticeship, which might include incestuous relations with mother, sister, or mother-in-law, or sleeping on the grave of the mother for one night. The sorcerer then learns the medicines and finally demonstrates his power by killing a young relative by magic; he waits till the victim is buried, and then magically exhumes him for the secret feast with his fellow sorcerers. Each sorcerer who shares the flesh owes a debt to the one who secured the victim.

Charms are used as preventive measures against sorcery. When a diviner has diagnosed the cause of death as sorcery, retaliatory measures are taken. The headmen of the village could either call in the witchfinder to identify the offender or he could call in the diviner to take action against all the sorcerers in the village. After the diviner, *Mabitalila*, had revealed the guilty ones, they were challenged to take the poison ordeal to prove their innocence. If they died, the proof and the punishment were simultaneously accomplished. If they survived, the diviner was held to have been at fault and they were acquitted. The witch doctor was supposed to entice sorcerers to the graveside, and slay them with magic more powerful than their own.

The diviner's findings are to-day checked by the poison ordeal administered to a chicken. A sorcerer detected in this way might be asked to provide medicine for the man whose sickness he had caused, or after a death he might be compelled to pay compensation. If the accused is a village headman, he will not be summoned before a chief, but his brother will take the villagers away from the sphere of his influence, or he may be chased away from the district. Accusations of sorcery follow certain regular lines. Nearly all accusations fall on relatives. Diviners are consulted by matrilineal relatives of the sick or dead person, and the man most usually accused is the brother of the accuser, or the husband of his sister. Witchcraft is therefore a manner of expressing the hostilities latent in these relations, which are, in the Yao social system, full of tension.

[1] Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, p. 70.
[2] Hetherwick, 3, 1902.
[3] Hackel, 1935, pp. 14–15; Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, pp. 58–75, 204–13.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

631 advocates the more orthodox type of Islamic devotion in which
643 a quiet restrained manner is emphasized. As far as I know the
745 *twaliki* sect are confined entirely to Jalasi's chiefdom and the *sukutu* to Kawinga and Liwonde. In this matter, Nyambi's people side with Kawinga's and Liwonde's.

631 On the other hand, local informal organization is well de-
643 veloped so that Chiwalo who is at the point of juxtaposition of
692 Kawinga, Liwonde, Nyambi and Jalasi chiefdoms, may try cases involving headmen from any of these areas, and they usually accept his arbitration. His is the nearest court house. The actual boundaries of the four areas, however, are very clearly recognized and Chiwalo realizes the limits of his jurisdiction. Though he may arbitrate in a difference between headmen, he would not dare to apportion land outside his area. Headmen living on the boundaries of two chiefdoms arbitrate in each other's cases; the
621 villagers under them intermarry. A village in Chiwalo's may
631 procure garden lands in Jalasi's area, and children may be initiated at ceremonies held by headmen in other chiefdoms. There is no
643 clear break in the normal social relationships of people across the boundaries of chiefdoms, and their members interact as freely with each other as members of two villages of the same chiefdom. The cleavage between the villages on different sides of the boundary of a chiefdom becomes apparent only in special situations.

631 The formal relationships of the chiefs, set by the history of
643 their conquests and their kinship, and incorporated in and slightly modified by the Administrative framework, are overlaid by an informal local organization where the interaction of village headmen only conforms to the formal pattern when no agreement can be reached.

The Position of the Modern Chief

643 In ritual situations a chiefdom is clearly differentiated from its
769 neighbours, and many of these situations arise in the cult of
782 tendence on the ancestor spirits. The ancestor cult has fallen away almost completely among village headmen, but among the chiefs it is still strong, and appears particularly in the rain-prayers and the initiation ceremonies. Later, I shall discuss at length the importance of the chief's sanction before headmen may conduct initiation ceremonies. This is because the spirits

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

of the ancestors of the chief are supposed to affect the welfare of the initiands. Though some village headmen may conduct initiation ceremonies they are unable to offer rain-prayers. These are offered by a chief on two occasions. The first is in November, before the rains have started. The chief's wife and some women from the bigger villages in the near vicinity of the chief's village gather at his hut. They brew beer—*ukana wacisoka*, the beer of the spirits—to be used as a libation. At sunset on the appointed day the chief goes to the shrine tree where some headmen have gathered, and pours some of the beer into a pot, partly buried at the root of the tree, while he invokes all the spirits of his departed ancestors—mainly matrilineal but occasionally some patrilateral. He then entreats the spirits to send some rain and to look after their 'children' in the land. Sometimes a length of calico is hung on the tree as an extra offering. Should no rain fall the chief will have to repeat the offering until it does fall. When the rains have ended in March he makes a second offering 'of thanks'.

In the context of the present discussion, the important point is that it is only the chief who can make this libation and offer this prayer. If his plea fails the whole area starves, and no headman may supplicate his ancestors on his own behalf or approach the chief's ancestors through his own ancestors. The grain for the beer comes from the various villages, but not on a fixed rate of levy. Some villages never contribute. The chief buys the offered cloth on behalf of his people. When in 1948 the cloth on the shrine tree was stolen, Chiwalo imposed a levy on the village headmen in the area so that a new cloth could be bought. Here the boundaries of the chiefdoms are important, and no headman outside Chiwalo's area was approached. A village headman from Jalasi's area, though geographically much closer to Chiwalo, relies on Jalasi's rain-offerings and may not approach Chiwalo or plead with him to offer a rain-prayer to his ancestors.

Another ritual situation in which the limits of the chiefdom appear is during the institutionalized pillage on the death of a chief. I have not been in any area when the chief has died, so that I rely here on the tales of informants. During the mourning rites certain feasts are held. The food for the mourning feast of a commoner or village headman is provided from his estate

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

622 554 648 annuity. This recognition publicly announced their superior status, because not all headmen could be Administrative headmen. We do not know exactly how the Administrative headmen were appointed when the Ordinance was introduced. The observable results, however, are that no headman, as far as I am aware, who was of superior status in the indigenous ranking system, is not an Administrative headman to-day. Being an Administrative headman is then in itself an indicator of rank.

622 554 643 415 769 881 Rather more important than this is the right to hold initiation ceremonies. MacDonald says that these rights were held by the chief only, but it is not clear whether the word 'chief' used here refers to the village headmen or the 'chief of the land'. Nowadays, the rights are held by village headmen as well as the chief. The right to hold initiation ceremonies is signified by the possession of a small flat basket (*ciselo*) in which the oblational flour for the ceremonies is carried. When a chief grants a *ciselo* or oblational basket to a village headman, what in fact he does is to grant him permission to approach the spirits of his ancestors. The headman uses the basket on three occasions during the initiation ceremonies. First, before the ceremony is announced he pours a little cone of sorghum meal at the root of a special tree in or near the village. This tree is known as the *nsolo*, or the shrine-tree where all offerings to the ancestors are made. While he works the flour through his fingers to allow it to fall in a cone, he calls on his ancestral spirits and asks them to intercede on his behalf with the spirits of the chief's ancestors. He then formally requests permission to hold the initiation ceremony. This cone is left intact through the night. Should it collapse the interpretation is that the spirits are not willing that the ceremony should take place and it is postponed for some days. Offerings are made until eventually the cone, by remaining intact through the night, indicates that all propitious for the ceremony to be conducted. The second occasion when the oblational basket is used is when the village headman or chief goes down to the grass sheds where the rites of segregation and aggregation take place. Here he pours flour over a twig and begs the safe conduct of the initiands through this physically and mystically dangerous period. Third, each individual initiand, and his or her mother, is touched on the forehead and forearm with the flour on the evening that the initiands leave for the grass sheds. During

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

who are sexually inactive from contracting *ndaka*.[1] At the same time the headman gives each household a piece of the fire which has been newly kindled in the traditional way by rubbing two sticks together.

The mystical danger inherent in the act of setting up a new village is well brought out in the propitiatory prayer and the abstinence from sexual intercourse. Once again it is the village headman who must make the offering to his ancestors; and it is the village headman who has intercourse with his wife so that the effluvium from his sexual activity may permeate the medicine in the hut and so protect the villagers from *ndaka*. Lastly, it is very important that the whole village cooks and is warmed by one fire. 'We are of one fire' expresses the common origin of two villages; though in fact every time a new village is founded a new fire should be kindled. To bring fire from the village of origin is to bring sorcery, since the Yao believe that sorcery can operate between persons closely linked by kinship only. To have one's own fire is to be autonomous from other groups.

The Burdens and Rewards of Headmanship

MacDonald had the perspicuity to see not only that the village headman was the representative of a corporate group and that he represented this group to outsiders, but also that he represented external authority to his villagers. The village headman who in his person stood for the unity of the group, performed certain ritual acts which emphasized this, such as praying to the village ancestors. In spite of the decline of the ritual his position is still regarded as exceptional. Much, however, depends on the rank of the village headman. There may not be much difference in ritual observances and mystical dangers between a headman who has in his charge a meagre three or four huts, and a commoner. In the larger and more important

[1] This is one of the most important mystical concepts of the Yao. I have described this condition and its implications more fully in *Marriage among the Machinga Yao of Southern Nyasaland* (R.-L.I. Paper), forthcoming. Briefly it is a disease characterized by œdema which affects those who are sexually inactive when they are suddenly brought into contact with a person, or an object which he has touched, after having intercourse. The people most affected are the young and the old, i.e. those who cannot have sexual intercourse. Those who are capable of intercourse are expected to have ritual intercourse with a stranger, and so fortify themselves against this dread disease.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

Among the relatives of the largest order of kinship (*cipepo*) there is a bond only slightly more intimate than that among people who have the same clan-name. There are none of the jural and moral obligations which characterize membership of a matrilineage which is a part of a village. The larger group, for which there is no exact Yao term, may be looked upon as a maximal lineage. It is characterized by a relationship of a more definite bond than that of having a common clan-name, but the members may still marry.

The Matrilineage

It is within the village that the matrilineage operates most clearly. The distant matrilineal link which connects villages such as Cikoja, Mbande and Cibwana Kawinga, is set in a context of inter-village relationships and is therefore part of the political system. Within the village the matrilineage becomes a corporately acting group of a different dimension. It is in this order of lineage within the village that we have the set of relationships described by Professor Fortes as applying to the inner lineage[1] among the Gold Coast Tallensi.

The depth of a matrilineage within a village is seldom more than five or six generations from the founding ancestress to the new-born children. The name of the founding ancestress is remembered and the descent of each member of the matrilineage can easily be recounted. The ancestress is known as the *likolo* or *lipata*, words which also refer to the trunk of a tree. We have seen how at a headman's installation ceremony the image of a tree was invoked in describing the lineage.[2] We find it once again here, where the founding ancestress is seen as the stem or root from which all members of the lineage have sprung, and the various sections of the matrilineage are seen as the branches (*nyambi*). This symbol of the lineage appears also during offerings to the ancestors. The chief, or headman, in

[1] See Fortes, M., *Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi*, Oxford University Press (London, 1945), and *The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi*, Oxford University Press (London, 1948). The Yao system of lineages is not the clearly segmented type of structure characteristic of the Tallensi. I hesitate, therefore, to use Fortes's terms, and use *matrilineage* for the localized unit which is usually a component of a village.

[2] See Chap. V, p. 119.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

making the oblation, pours the beer or sprinkles the flour at the root (*lipata*) of a shrine-tree. As would be consistent with this way of looking at the lineage, genealogically-distant ancestors are said to be 'below' (*pasi*), so that if a Yao wishes to say that a certain person was a matrilineal ancestor many generations back, he would say that he was 'very much below'.

The Concept of 'The Mother'

The matrilineal descendants of the founder look upon themselves as having been fed from the same breast and may express this by saying 'we are of one breast'.[1] Deep sentiment is attached to the idea of the mother among the Yao. There is, for example, a sharp distinction drawn between those women who have had children and those who have not. When a woman becomes pregnant for the first time, she is given instruction in child welfare when she undergoes a special ceremony (*litiwo*). This is a ceremony which is publicly announced and attended by most of her matrilineal and other kinswomen and acquaintances. No woman may attend this ceremony if she has not herself had a baby. Thus her change in status in the community is clearly shown by the public recognition of her condition, and the fact that she is initiated into secrets which are shared by other mothers only. Her position in the lineage is much enhanced when she becomes a mother. It is the most important step towards becoming a village founder herself.

The concept of 'the mother', in general, also appears in the boys' initiation ceremonies. Certain phases of ceremonies may be conducted only with the help of the women. They have to clap the rhythm to which the 'tailmen'[2] do their dances. Here all women are classified as 'mothers' and without their co-operation the ceremonies could not be conducted. During the same ceremonies three women appear with baskets of food on their heads. The tailmen remove the baskets and sacralize the

[1] *Tuli peŵele pamo.* The word *mlango*, a doorway, is also commonly used. The idea in essence is exactly the same. It is the concept of the children who come to settle around a woman's hut door. It is used as *ilando pamlango pao*, the people of his lineage section.

[2] The *nʼchokwa*. These are the functionaries in the initiation ceremonies. They carry medicated zebra tails during these ceremonies, and this gives them their names. See especially Swanson, 'The Wayao of Nyasaland', 229 ff.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

contents. Here once again the women, though they may have no boys in the initiation ceremony, are called 'the mothers'. The ritual co-operation of the mothers in the initiation ceremonies is paralleled by that of mothers and sons in political affairs: here sons are in charge of the villages, while their mothers and sisters form the nucleus of the localized kinship group, which in turn is the core of the village.

The ritual importance of the mother is nowhere more clearly seen than in the curse. The Yao believe that a mother may curse her child if he or she is disobedient or otherwise beyond control. Not many mothers do curse their children; the threat to curse seems to be more often used. Informants have told me of some mothers who have cursed their children, and the procedure and the wording of the curse have always been very similar. It is usually not applied to young children who could be punished by other means, but to adults and particularly adolescents. Usually the mother lifts her breast and points the nipple upwards saying, 'If you have never sucked from this breast nothing dreadful will happen to you.' The consequences of this are greatly feared. Where I have been told of curses, each time the child has either died suddenly shortly after the curse, or at least it has gone mad. The curse is vaguely supposed to operate through the ancestor spirits, but I could get no clear statement on how this happens.[1] Whatever the cause, however, the symbolic action of lifting the breast and the dire effects which are supposed to follow from this, indicate the importance of the mother in the lineage.

The Yao attach this sentiment, in general, not only to the mother, but also to all senior matrilineal female relatives. In general speech all female members of the matrilineage in ascending generations are 'mothers', and all members in the descending generations are 'children'. This fundamental relation of mother and child extends throughout the lineage. The Yao term *nimangolo*, used for the senior female members of the matrilineage, embodies this idea of 'the mothers'. More specifically, as far as men are concerned, the matrilineage is classified into

[1] Further evidence that the ancestor spirits are involved in the curse may be that madness is called *mambo*—spirits—and that it may be said of a madman that the spirits are beating him (*pakumpata mambo*). A curse may be revoked by blowing water out of the mouth, an act which is also vaguely connected with the ancestor spirits.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

members goes to an outsider and grumbles to him about the family squabbles[1] and quarrels. The outsider then takes the opportunity of using this squabble to introduce his sorcery into the lineage. The Yao greatly fear backbiting because of their dread of sorcery and none dreads it more than a village headman, a warden of a sorority-group,[2] or a person in the position of having to keep a matrilineage or section together. These people are continually adjuring the women under them—for it is the women who are believed to be the main culprits—not to fight among themselves; and if they do, not to take their complaints to an outsider but to the senior member of the matrilineage. The significance of this in relation to lineage unity is plain enough.

Apart from sorcery, strained relationships between members of a matrilineage are believed to be dangerous for other reasons. Malice may adversely affect people who are in mystically dangerous states. The most common of these states is pregnancy. If a woman has a quarrel with a matrilineage member while she is pregnant she is likely to have a difficult labour. The Yao say 'the womb has heard these bad words'. Another situation where malice or quarrelling will cause difficulties is in hunting. The luck of the chase is capricious and malice may easily bring bad fortune to an otherwise good hunter. For example, a successful hunter once gave each of his two sisters a piece of venison. Each complained that the other had been given the larger piece and quarrelled vehemently about it for weeks. The hunter now found that no game fell into his traps. He went to a diviner who indicated the quarrel of the sisters as the cause of his failure and told the hunter to get them to 'blow water' (*kuperye*). He did this; good relationships were restored and his traps were filled once more.

These deleterious effects, like the curse, are connected in some way with the ancestor spirits. This is sometimes expressed quite clearly when a person is called upon to 'blow water'. A mother who wishes to revoke a curse, a woman who wishes to recant her malice towards her matrilineal relative who is suffering in childbirth, or a man whose sister's son is ill supposedly because

[1] This is called *mimi*, which I have translated as 'backbiting'. This idea is extremely important, as we shall see later.

[2] I.e. those men who are responsible for their sisters and their descendants. See p. 143 ff.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

of his malice towards him, might equally be called upon to do this. The person makes a statement to the effect that he bears no malice and hopes that the sufferer will be well. For example, a woman in Cikoja village who was called upon to 'blow water' during the labour pains of her mother's younger sister's daughter's daughter,[1] because they had quarrelled over a sifting basket, put some water in her mouth, spat it out and said: 'Those words I spoke: the basket is mine. This is my child. Both are mine. When I spoke and asked my child about it, they were not words to place in my heart, so that to-day we should have to go to the diviner because my child is hitched[2] and be accused because of the sifting basket. These words I push aside. I do not know whether there are other words that we fought about, but if they are these, my daughter's child come out!'[3] Sometimes the ancestors are specifically invoked, '*Conde, conde wamasoka . . .*' 'Please, please, O spirits . . .' This is a public confession of the tension within the lineage and it allows the lineage leaders to attempt to straighten out the difficulties, as they did in this case.[4]

These beliefs in mystical dangers of one sort or another which beset the matrilineage as the result of bad feelings within it, have the effect of constraining matrilineage members to maintain peaceable relations among themselves and are, therefore, conducive to maximum solidarity.

It is clear from MacDonald's writings that in earlier times the periodic offerings to the spirits of the ancestors was a valuable way in which the solidarity of the matrilineage was expressed. With the introduction of Islam and Christianity these sacrifices have disappeared. I have not worked in Christian areas long enough to be able to say whether the ancestor cult still persists. In the northern area, however, I can say that the ancestor cult survives as part of the practice of Islam. Periodically, feasts are held in

[1] See the history of the division in Cikoja lineage, pp. 165-6.

[2] *Kukolekwa*, i.e. the child cannot be born.

[3] *Une malo@gala cisolo cila cangwe. Aja mwamanya. Yesepe pangwe. Pinawesetaga nilumaya, kumbaya mwamanya, ngisiwa malo@e gakwisha kuzilisa, gati ngaka kilo nilwendo kwisanga cakolekwa mwamanga nilumbamula mu ligonga lya cisolo. Celaga ngwatako. Kwalisi ngapali gati gatawa kangamile nambo ngapaga malo@e gakwe, cimbalo cangu cikapwa.*

[4] I have drawn attention to the cathartic effect of accusations of sorcery and public confession of guilt in a paper, 'A Note on the African Conception of Causality', *The Nyasaland Journal*, v, 2 (July 1952), 57-8.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

613 769 178 memory of the ancestors. These are called *sadaka*[1] and are similar to those held at the end of the mourning period. They are usually held when one of the lineage members has had a dream about an ancestor. The senior members are told of this and interpret it to mean that a feast in his memory should be held. The women cook a meal of mush and relish and on an appointed day the members of the matrilineage who live within a reasonable distance gather at the village of the senior section and share the feast. During this feast Islamic texts are chanted in Arabic. It is clear that in this situation the context of the meeting is exactly the same as that of the old offerings made by the lineage leader at the shrine-tree. The common ancestor is recalled and the matrilineage by meeting reaffirms its solidarity.

The Localized Matrilineage

613 621 The matrilineage may itself be localized in the form of a hamlet or small village, as in Ali Kasunka village. It has 9 huts situated about half a mile from Chiwalo's court house in Kawinga's area. The genealogy, hut plan and census are set out in Appendix B. I summarize the genealogy here to show how the hut owners in the village are related. The village is about 300 yards across and about a quarter of a mile from the main road.

Ali Kasunka (C6),[2] the warden of the village, formerly lived in a village known by his mother's brother's name Mailo (B1). Ali Kasunka is the son of the chieftain Mposa in Kawinga's area. The village of Mailo still exists in Mposa area. Ali Kasunka and his sisters moved out of Mailo village and established a hamlet in Malemia's area near Zomba township. While they were there Ali Kasunka went to work as a domestic servant in Zomba. One day the sister of the cook in the household in which he was working came down to visit her brother. She became Ali Kasunka's second wife (he was already married to a woman from Malemia area) and lived with him in Zomba. She was the daughter of the present chief Chiwalo, and was living at her

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[1] Sanderson says that this is derived from the Arabic word *sadaqa* which means 'alms'. Sanderson, M., on 'Ceremonial Purification among the Wayao, Nyasaland', *Man*, xxii, 55 (June 1922), 92-5.

[2] The reference number is to assist the reader to identify the person on the genealogy in Appendix B.

3: Seamus D-6 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT? Yao FT?

then leisure to an account of the circumstances attending the illness and death. The point at issue is whether there is any evidence pointing to death from unnatural causes which requires consulting a diviner. The chief practically always agrees with the relatives, and it is said that he will never press them to go to the mchimwapo unnecessarily. The [illegible] and with this mchimwapo, or here may begin the long series of events described under mtoli.[1]

During the month subsequent to the funeral, certain taboos have to be observed. The widow may not bathe, and with the exception of the mwiti, all who attended must refrain from sexual intercourse. At the expiration of this period, beer is brewed in the village, and all the friends and relatives are again summoned. This beer-drinking is called "the beer of mtimapamo," or "the beer of resignation." In addition to the beer, food is provided, and everyone helps himself without ceremony. Chinduindo is sung and danced and at the present day, bands of trained dancers attend, including chinyamwezi songs.[2] A pot of beer is sunk into the ground, marking the site of the dead man's house. The night of mwinyolo[3] sees husbands and wives reunited, and the widow may go through ceremonial intercourse with a man appointed for the purpose called litowa or ndolo. Sometimes the widow refuses litowa, and is given medicine instead to cleanse her; her body is then no longer "hot" and likely to bring disease to those about her. A widow does not marry again for two or three years. A young man who loses his wife has no longer any standing in her village after mwinyolo. He is usually given a present, with the suggestion that he go elsewhere. After the death of an infant, the mother is considered unclean. She sleeps on a mat apart from her husband till after the ceremony of shaving, and then undergoes a ceremonial coitus with her husband — in which case he is called litowa — after which, ordinary cohabitation is resumed. If she has been a widow, or if the child was born "with disease,"[4] another man acts as litowa.

The morning following mwinyolo, all the fires in the village are extinguished. A fresh blaze is then kindled with the fire-drill, hereupon, either in the chief's house or in some spot nearby, and from there, fire is carried to all the houses. The ashes of the old fires, the stones supporting the cooking pots, and the porridge sticks are taken to the cross-roads, and there destroyed. Everyone then shaves all his own hair, head, axillae, and pubis. The custom of the second shaving by the mwiti, described in *Africana*,[5] is, I think, an adaptation from the Anyanja. A year later, beer is again brewed, and all the relatives summoned to the village to partake of it. There is dancing, but no ceremony.

The Yao bury their dead in regular graveyards in wooded country, the thicker the forest the better, often two or three miles away from a group of villages. Different villages bury their dead in different parts of the burial ground; relatives are usually buried near one another. Graves are never revisited, and no one would enter a graveyard except at the time of a funeral, and then only after obtaining permission from the chief. Such spots are

[1] This latter, p. 000.
[2] This latter, p. 000 and Pl. 0.
[3] Beer-drinking.
[4] This latter, p. 000.
[5] Macdonald, op. cit., p. 000.

3: Stanner D-5 (ca. 1912) 1932 FT7 Yao FT7

supposed to be the abode of spirits. Except in the case of chiefs, the Wayao never make any structure over their graves, like the Anyanja grass shelters, and the present-day Mohammedan earth imitations of Swahili tombs.

766 Chiefs, and the more important headmen, are usually buried in their own villages. Over the grave, a grass hut with a verandu is erected; the hut is covered with calico, and guns were formerly set in as verandu posts. Guns and ivory used to be buried with the corpse [567] but these Yao, I am told, never practised the barbarous custom of burying slaves with their chiefs. Information of the death of a chief was always conveyed to other chiefs by slaves who were kept by the recipient of the message.

Since the time of the old Makenya, the corpse of a chief always lies with its head in the direction of the old chief's grave. The grave is swept around, and the house pulled down as in the case of an ordinary man, but the grave-hut is rebuilt every year and never forgotten.

Since the burial of the dead is more or less correlated with the idea of planting seed from which progeny will spring, the natives will not bury a leper, believing that if they did so, leprosy would spring up all around them. Persons dying of an epidemic disease such as small-pox are dealt with in the same way. In these cases and in that of a man dying of ordeal poison, the body is enclosed in a mat and put up in a tree, a manner of disposing of the dead common among the Angoni and some Anyanja. Concerning death from dropsy, similar precautions are taken to those in the instance of a woman dying in childbirth,[1] and a tube is put down to the body from the surface of the ground.

A leper feeling that the end is near, will ask to be put in a hut built outside the limits of the burial ground. Here, provided with water and food for a few days, he will wait to die near the graveyard wherein he knows he cannot be buried.

[763] Anyone who is wounded with a spear or any other weapon is not taken into the village, but is kept in a hut in the bush. If death results, the mourning ceremonies differ somewhat from the ordinary rites and are much curtailed.

Initiation Ceremonies. Under this heading I propose to deal with the three ceremonies, *Lupondo*, *Chipale* and *Litiso*. They are ceremonies of great importance in the life of the native and their educative effect for the good of the tribe is far reaching.

At *Lupondo* (*Wakapaki*) the young boys attend; at *Chipale* the young girls go through their initiation and a rite necessary for young married men takes place, while *Litiso* celebrates the first quickening with child. All the ceremonies are included in the word *Unyago*. Macdonald in *Africana* while referring to "the mysteries"[2] gives scant information about the ceremonies and has, presumably, without much knowledge of what goes on, condemned these customs like many others as furthering "absurd superstitions." He has failed to recognise that they are occasions when a large amount of useful advice is imparted, good manners are insisted on, and tribal custom is made known. Sexual questions are dealt with in these mysteries, and, though mixed up with a large amount of superstition, a

[1] This paper, p. 350. [2] Op. cit., vol. ii, ch. i.

There has never been any shortage of land and therefore the planting out of gardens was a matter which caused little trouble. A man wishing to make a new garden the next season simply marked the site in the bush by sowing some trees or leaving around some patches of grass and tying the grass ends into a knot. If anyone else came along and found this plot, the man who had marked it out still claimed it and could not pay for the leaving down. Whenever a man was doubtful about a piece of land, he would ask advice of the headmen of the village.

When an abandoned garden had become overgrown, anyone wishing to take it up applied to the headmen who sent him to ask the original owners whether they wished to take it up again. The newcomer could take possession only with their permission.

Often if a village were moved, during the first season the people simply put up shelters in their gardens. Later, the site of the village was chosen and around it a medicine was sprinkled medicine to insure happiness and prosperity. The tree from which this medicine was made became sacred to the village and might not be used for firewood, or was subject to any other taboo the medicine man might care to make. He might also say, "In this village there shall be no pounding of grain at night," etc.

If a village were to be built near a spot previously inhabited, medicine and offerings were made to the departed spirits of the former occupants to put them at rest and "open" the place to the newcomers. The bone got from the grave of some former chief or headman, who was supposed to have directed the destinies of the old village, was brought to the new location and here placed in it to insure his continued guidance.

In the case of a village into which a number of men had married, the spouses of the wives went to the spouses of the husbands and asked permission to move the village.[1] Later, beer was brewed in the new village and the spouses invited to come and drink and "put fruit in the new village."

Relationship. Family relationship among natives presents certain difficulties to the European accustomed to equivalent relationship of males and females on both sides of the family. In the diagram below (Fig. 1) the relationship of the two children (C 6) will be found. The mother and father (3 10 and 9) are the subjects and were but are addressed as wives and child. The maternal uncles elder and younger than the mother (3 11 and 12) are called *chombwa* and their wives (3 13 and 14) *chongwa*. The maternal aunts are addressed *ai wewa*, mother, anyone older than the mother being distinguished as *wewa mukulungwa*, "the bigger" (3 15), a younger aunt as *wewa wamunki*, "the lesser" (3 17); their respective husbands are addressed *atati*, *atati mukulungwa* (3 16), and *atati wamunki* (3 18). On the father's side the males are called *atati mukulungwa* (3 1) and *atati wamunki* (3 2), respectively, for those older and younger than the father, and their wives *wewa mukulungwa* (3 5) and *wewa wamunki* (3 6). The paternal aunts are called *atati mukulungwa* (female modes) (3 3 and 7), their husbands (3 4 and 8) *atati*.

[1] Vide supra, p. 280.

3: Nyasaland D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

one is to "God the creator," of man or earth. He, however, receives the spirits of the dead. Should he refuse to do so, a man continues to live. When a man has recovered from some commonly fatal disease, the natives say, "*M'ulungu wakanile* (refused him)!" or if he has been very near to death and then recovers, they say "*M'ulungu wamemile* (spat him out)".

It would thus appear that among the spirit hosts there is a regular law of precedence, and presiding over all is a supreme being, but all this is so remote as to have little importance for the living. The vagueness concerning *M'ulungu*, I must admit, has given rise to some doubt in my own mind as to how far he was a deity with an entity of his own in their religion of a little time ago.

Ancestors tend to be forgotten in proportion to the length of time which has elapsed since their death, unless they played some important part during their lives: then some particular one may be remembered to the exclusion of others, and to him prayers of intercession are offered. In the case of *chiefs*, the names of a long line of rulers may be remembered on occasions when all else about them has fallen into oblivion. It seems possible originally *M'ulungu* was the oldest ancestral chief who was raised up as a supreme being but who, in the process, has lost all other attributes. On the other hand, the word often refers only to the place where the spirits dwell; this may have been the original meaning.

There is no religious worship in the proper sense of the term but only propitiation, prayer for intercession, and return of thanks for favors granted. The keynote of this ancestor worship, the sum total of their religion to the exclusion of the belief in a supreme being, is fear. We have seen at the funeral that everything is done to lay the spirit at rest. The people wish never to hear of the spirit again. It is chiefly with a view of averting some evil that worship takes place or with a view of expiating some crime that sacrifice is made or to alleviate some suffering that communication is sought with the spirits. It is a question of, "Do us no harm, do not vent your wrath upon us for what we have left undone," rather than "Keep us from doing evil, save us from being our own enemies." It would appear to be a religion of *spite*, not of love and kindness, though there are glimmerings of a search after "a hand to guide and protect," as in the prayer given below and also in the action taken when removing a village.

As a corollary of this system of ancestor worship, there is no real priesthood. A man asks for favors for himself; the head of a family petitions a deceased father or some more remote ancestor of greater importance; the headman intercedes on behalf of the village with the spirit of a predecessor; a *chief* takes the place of high priest on the occasion of a tribal supplication to a former ruler, though he may be replaced by some one of his wise men who acts as intermediary.

Some form of sacrifice is offered with the prayer, and often some omen is sought as a sign that the prayer is granted. For this purpose, flour made from millet called *nkuyani* (*mawele*, Chin.) is commonly used. The word *nkuyani* probably includes any sacrificial offerings.

3:Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

769 484 787 A man leaving his village on some expedition and wishing to be assured of safe conduct will procure some millet flour. Going quietly into his house, he squats down in one corner and gently sifts the flour through his hand so that it falls on the floor in the form of a little cone, repeating as he does so, his prayer for safe conduct beginning and ending with the word *chondo!* please!

[539] *"Chondo! chondo! wa-ku-mulungu ambuje mlangwaje nawe ganga nilinawe*
"Please, please! those at above ancestor chief eyes mine that I may see
litale, ngaicha 'chinawe kungwiji, chondo! chondo! chawawondo!"
the path, may I arrive well where I go, please, please, please!"

He then covers the cone of flour with a basket. On the morrow, he will uncover it to see what has happened. According as the cone has remained intact or has fallen to one side or the other, the omen indicates whether or not the journey should be undertaken, the reaction being caused by the spirits to whom his supplication was addressed.

769 Again, there may have occurred much sickness in a village and the people conclude that the pest has come to remind them that they have not been attentive to their deceased chief. "His grave-house in the village has been allowed to fall into decay," and so on. They will decide that his spirit must be propitiated. The grave-house is rebuilt, a pot is sunk in the ground, and beer is poured in, and round about heaps of flour are placed. Prayer is made to the chief at whose grave they are worshipping, supplicating him in person and "all others who are with you at *Mlungu*," asking that he will no longer cause ill to befall the village.

When a village is moved, the beer-pot from the grave of the old chief is taken to the new village and a ceremony similar to that just described takes place, with the prayer that he will come to the new village and continue to exercise his benevolent care over his people.

731 769 In 1880 when there was a threatened famine on account of long drought in Zomba district, Malemya decided that supplication for rain must be made to the spirits of his illustrious predecessors. Kasunga, one of Malemya's wise men, acted as high priest. A large amount of beer was brewed and the night before the ceremony, twenty sheep and fifty goats were slaughtered. Plates of the meat, of rice and porridge were then placed on the ground round the grave-house of the old Malemya, and pots of beer set into the ground at intervals. At the head of the grave, little heaps of *mbeyani* flour were arranged. This flour had been prepared by such of Malemya's wives as were not near a menstrual period. The following morning, a fence was built round the grave, outside which all the people collected, while beyond them again was a second fence. Kasunga, accompanied by an assistant then appeared, and amid absolute silence entered the inner enclosure. He addressed to the old Malemya, at whose grave they were all assembled, a prayer for rain. He then repeated the prayer, invoking the aid of all the past line of chiefs down to the reigning Malemya, repeating their names. Returning to the outer enclosure, he again uttered the prayers, all the assembled multitude repeating them after him while lying face down, resting on their

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knees and elbows, at intervals swaying their bodies from side to side and clapping their hands. Kasanga then ordered all to go and bathe, men and women separately. As they returned from the stream, rain began to fall.

Intercession on behalf of the sick may be made, especially by anyone who is likely to be accused of causing the illness by witchcraft.[1] The man standing with arms outstretched, downwards and a little in front of his body, the hands supine, takes some water in his mouth and discharges it in a stream on the ground, (probably as a sign of purification of his tongue), and then invoking "all the spirits above," asks that they will intercede to restore health to the sick man and bear witness to his own innocence of any wish to do the sick man injury. *Ku-penya* is the word meaning to offer sacrifice and prayer.

Harvesting and hunting are occasions when sacrifices may be offered. It was formerly the custom for the *chief* to determine the day on which harvesting of millet should begin. On the day appointed, a big drum was beaten in the village and word passed round; then everyone would go down to his garden, gather a head of millet, and bring it back to the village where it was all handed over to the chief's headwife. After drying and threshing, a little of the grain was laid at the grave of an old chief by one of the reigning chief's advisers, the remainder being again distributed to all the people gathered together in the village meeting-place, who ate it raw. After this ceremony, harvesting began.

In passing through a millet garden, if a child asks his mother to give him some to eat, she plucks a bunch or two and reverently lays one at the foot of a *mavo* tree for the spirits or at the base of some other tree, if she cannot see a *mavo*, she gives the rest to the child.

When a hunting expedition makes its first killing, part of the flesh of the animal is laid at the base of a tree as a thank offering to the spirits and in anticipation of further favors to be conferred. All such offerings are supposed by the natives to be partaken of by the spirits, though they are well aware that they do not actually diminish in quantity. There is an interesting point in this connection: any man who has acted as *ndile* (undertaker) to some well-known man may appropriate these offerings. In the case of the hunting offering, he will run round the tree, saying, "I am a hyæna, the spirits will not mind me," and will then take part of the flesh-offering and eat it.

In the same way, a *ndile* may drink from a grave beer-pot after three days, when the spirits are supposed to have taken what they want.

With the exception of the *mavo* tree above mentioned (*mkwa*, Chin.), and possibly another called *mlilo-nguwo* (Chin.), which is never used as firewood and which is supposed to be used by women, I do not think there are any sacred trees properly so-called. Miss Werner supposes that many of the big trees (often a species of *Ficus*) in villages are sacred.[2] The truth is, I believe, simply that a village is made naturally round a big tree which conveniently offers its shade for the village meeting place. The spirits of deceased chiefs may

[1] Vide supra, p. 307. [2] The natives of British Central Africa, op. cit., p. 62.

3:Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT? Yao FT?

18. *Chembuge, wakile nguwe ukisi!*
Chembuge, they ate guinea-fowl raw!

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An expression depending for its meaning on the story given below, used by a husband to his wife or by one woman to another, intimating that the woman has delegated her work to some one else and is not looking after things properly. A man killed a guinea-fowl and gave it to his wife to cook. She, however, gave it to her servant, Chembuge, to cook in the house while she sat doing nothing on the veranda, calling from time to time to know whether it was cooking well, to which always came answer in the affirmative, "eh." When the meal of porridge was ready in the evening, and she went to get the guinea-fowl from the pot in the kitchen, she found that it lay in the pot in cold water as her servant had only put one handful of grass to make the fire under the pot and then left it.

14. *Kwa'mukiba nunguio ukunguasi!*
By holding a torch aloft (*to see if* the hare was asleep) before it had lain down!

An expression used to a man who by precipitate action without due caution loses that which he seeks to gain as in the following case: If a man seeks a girl in marriage whom he wants to take to live with him far away in his own village, instead of himself settling in her village according to custom, he must not let this be known or he would be refused.

15. *Wakuniye wakisi!*
(*Your* wife) she is showing the porridge stick!

An expression used to a man who is homesick.

16. *Mwa wa kukondaki!*
(He has or you have) the perseverance of a mister!

An expression used to anyone who keeps on asking for something and is a nuisance.

17. *Mkupasi kupakulaga ku mwe ni ku ukongo kumbusi!*
The flour (*ought*) to be painted on the forehead and on the back of the head *also!*

Mkupasi is the offering of millet flour to the departed spirits, or as here, the sacrificial flour used by the *chief* to smear the front and back of the head of each boy at the end of the initiation ceremonies. The meaning of the expression is that "one should not only look forward to the good things of the future but also remember all the help that has been given one in the past."

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18. *Mkaujingile mwe'nemile ngumbe ye tuka!*
He who comes and goes and comes again they shot him with an arrow in the buttocks!

Of which the moral is "a man may do wrong once but if he continues to do so, he will suffer for it."

19. *Liguluwe kumbila ukisi!*
The pig was made a scapegoat (*on account of*) the gleanings!

A pig who was found picking up the remnants of a crop in a field which had been reaped, was thought to be the thief and killed.

7: Hetherwick M-5 (ca. 1900) 1902 FT7 Yao FT7

present fortunes. But it is to the human soul after death, when it is considered as having an influence on the lives and fortunes of those it has left behind in the world and consequently as a power to be propitiated and honoured, that the term *malenga* is more strictly applied. Freed from the body it passes to *malenga*, and there is regarded as endowed with powers which it never possessed when alive on earth. To pray to such a spirit is described as *kulomba malenga*, to worship *malenga*, never *kuabo* in this case. Such *malenga* worship enters largely into Yao religious or social life. In almost every Yao village there will be found a shrine which is the centre of the worship of the inhabitants. It consists of a carefully built hut enclosed within a strong grass fence or hedge of a species of cactus plant. The hut itself is built of the usual native materials—the walls of wooden posts, bamboos, and strong reed grass bound together with bark-rope and plastered over with clay or stiff mud. The roof is of grass laid on a framework of bamboos, and is generally covered with long strips of white or coloured calico. On the ridge or apex of the roof are fixed a couple of flags or an umbrella or two. One wall is usually left open so that the interior is easily seen. Within, from the bamboo rafters are suspended handkerchiefs, cloths, bunches of beads, etc., all offerings to the *malenga* of the dead headman or chief from his friends and relatives. The floor is of clay carefully smeared with mud in native fashion. A raised platform or mound of earth in the centre marks the spot where the grave was made. The *wafi* or officials who preside at the funeral obsequies, first dug for about 8 or 10 feet down in a perpendicular direction, and then on the western side of this well they hollowed out a shallow cave in the earth. In this the body was placed, laid on its side with the knees bent up under the chin, and the face turned towards the east. Various articles of personal property were next placed beside the corpse, clothes, ivory, guns, axes, hoes, etc., and the mouth of the cave closed up with wooden posts and a strong reed mat. The grave was then filled in and the surface carefully finished as we have seen. At the head of the mound a native pot was fixed in the ground for the reception of the offering of beer which is an almost invariable accompaniment of any act of worship paid to the *malenga* of the dead.

Such a shrine marks the grave of almost every Yao chief or headman, and is regarded as the abode of his soul or the spot where *his malenga is most accessible*. If his successor is about to undertake a long journey or enter on any warlike expedition against an enemy or neighbour, he must first *kutopa ndapasi*, place an offering here to secure the favour and assistance of the *malenga* of the dead. Should a long-continued drought endanger the prospects of the grain crop, the departed chief must be solicited to send the lacking rain. A feast is first prepared, almost always of beer, sometimes with the addition of native porridge, fowl, or goats. The worshippers gather round the shrine bringing part of the food which they have prepared. Their priest for the occasion is the successor of the dead chief, sometimes one or other of the *wafi* who placed the body in the grave, or it may be that any other near relation of the dead man is chosen to represent the people and act as their spokesman. The nearer the relationship the more influence will he have with the dead.

7: Hetherwick M-S (ca. 1900) 1902 FT7 Yao FT7

with the dead. He approaches the shrine, opens the gate of the fence, takes a 769
pinful of beer and pours it into the pot at the head of the grave. Next he places the basket of porridge and the plate of meat on the mound beside it and retires. Kneeling down outside the gate facing the shrine and a few yards in front of the people he chants his prayer in a monotone, each petition commencing with "Chonde, chonde," "Please, please." All the while the people clap their hands in unison with him and sing the response as they do in a native case in the chief's court.

When the offering has been made at the grave, the rest of the beer or other food is consumed by the worshippers. Some are first as a token of respect to the [535]
dead, and the rest of the day is spent in dancing.

Such shrines are to be seen in almost every Yao village where the inhabitants 778
have been located for any length of time. They are regarded with awe—the little 769
boys as they pass whisper to each other in a warning tone, "masoka." Should the village be moved to any other district, the old shrine is not forgotten. Periodical visits are made to it with the usual offerings. In cases where the old home has been occupied by a people hostile to the old inhabitants, such visits are usually made during the night, and the people awake in the morning to find that the old chief's grave in their midst has been newly repaired, and a fresh offering of food placed at its head.

Sometimes such shrines are found on the summits of hills which once may have been a refuge from the enemy in time of war, but which now lie lone and deserted. Thither in their need the people make their way with their offering of food and beer, and their prayer for rain or suitable weather for the crops. Near Blantyre such shrines are to be seen on the tops of Mount Soche and Mount Michiru. The former is the abode of the spirit of Kankomba, and the latter of Mpalale, both old Mawri or Mang'anja chiefs who doubtless fled there seeking safety from the war of the invading Yaos, and died leaving their wanda to be the mafungo or spirits of the mountain. Some years ago, during the fear of an Angoni invasion, the Yaos of Mount Soche fled to the hill-top for refuge, and there the old chief Kapasi died. He was buried close to the grave of the old Kankhomba, and now, when the Yaos on Soche make an offering, it is to the spirit of Kapasu that the homage is paid, and the shrine of Kankhomba lies neglected.

Only the graves of chiefs or headmen are thus treated as shrines of worship. 554
The burying places of slaves and the common people lie away in the thick bush, 764
where only the rank grass or the thicket of old trees marks the spot. No offerings 769
are ever taken there, for such as are buried there can have no influence in the 778
spirit world. The dead are buried, the broken pot or basket is left on the grave to mark the spot, and none ever seek to go there save to lay another in the same neglected ground.

II. But the word mafungo is used by the Yao with a wider application. 776
Etymologically the word is connected with the root kulungwa, which in so many 197
of the other branches of the Bantu tongue appears as kulu or kuru, and signifies "great" or "old." It is the same root which appears in the Kafir word for God, 192

7: Hetherwick M-5 (ca. 1900) 1902 FT7 Yao FT7

Unkulunkulu, which may therefore be rendered as "The old, old One," or "The great, great One." A like rendering may be given of the Yao form *mulungu*, the "Old One," or the "Great One." In this or a modified form *mwungu* (Swahili) it appears in all the Eastern group of the Bantu tongues as the equivalent for "God" (see Father Torrend's *Comparative Grammar of South African Bantu Languages*). To trace it as Father Torrend does to any connection with Moloch, the god of the Phœnicians, is to attach undue weight to a chance coincidence of sounds.

As we have already seen, the word *mulungu* is applied to the human *kivalo* when regarded as an object of worship, or as an inhabitant of the spirit world. But it is also used to denote that spirit world in general, or more properly speaking, *the aggregate of the spirits of all the dead*. The plural form of the word is rarely heard, unless when the allusion is made to the souls in their individualities. In its native use and form the word does not imply personality, for it does not belong to the personal class of nouns. Etymologically it is classed with the leg, heart, arm, head, etc., of the human frame. Its form denotes rather a state or property inhering in something, as the life or health inheres in the body. Among the various tribes where the word is in use as we have described, the missionaries have adopted it as the term for "God." But the untaught Yao refuses to assign to it any idea of being or personality. It is to him more a quality or faculty of the human nature whose signification he has extended so as to embrace the whole spirit world. Once after I had endeavoured to impress an old Yao headman with the personality of the Godhead in the Christian sense of the term, using the term *Mulungu*, my listener began to talk of "Che Mulungu," "Mr. God," showing that originally to him the word conveyed no idea of the personality I was ascribing to it.

And yet the Yao approaches closely to the idea of personality and a personal being, when he speaks of what *mulungu* has done and is doing. It is *mulungu* who made the world, and man, and animals. Far in the interior of the continent, toward the north-west, beyond the plains and swamps of the Lesangwa River and Lake Bangweolo, there lies, in Yao legend, an island in the midst of a lake called Kapiritimya. On that island there is to be seen a large flat rock marked by the footprints of men and animals of all kinds. When that rock was once a heap of moist clay, *mulungu* created all living things and sent them across the soft mass, where their footprints remained to be afterwards hardened into the imperishable rock. Such is the Yao legend of the creation of the world, and *mulungu* is always the Great Creator.

Mulungu is also regarded as the agent in anything mysterious. "It's *mulungu*," is the Yao exclamation on being shown anything that is beyond the range of his understanding. The rainbow is always "*mulungu*," although some Yaos have begun to use the Mang'anja term "uta wa Lesa," bow of Lesa.

Offerings are made to the spirit world or to *mulungu* as the great agency in the affairs of human life. Outside the village, or beside the headman's hut, may often be seen a rough shed. In this are placed the first-fruits of the new crop,

7: Hetherwick M-5 (ca.1900) 1902 FT7 Yao FT7

green maize, beans, pumpkins, peas, etc., as a thankoffering from the villagers for their harvest. This is described as *kulomba mulungu*, to worship *mulungu*. At the foot of the tree in the village courtyard, where the men sit and talk or work, an occasional small offering of flour or beer is placed on any special occasion in the life of the village or any of its inhabitants. This also is *kulomba mulungu*. A devout native sitting down to a meal will, before beginning to eat, take out a small morsel of the food before him and throw it at the root of the nearest tree as an offering to *mulungu*. On a journey a traveller will sometimes stop and lay a little flour in a pyramidal heap at the foot of a tree by the wayside or at an angle where two roads meet. This, like the others, is for *mulungu*, the spirit world, the guardian of the wayfarer on his journey.

Thus the Yao presents us with three stages of animistic belief:—

(1) The human *lisoka* or shade, the agent in dreams, delirium, etc.

(2) This *lisoka* regarded as *mulungu*, and an object of worship and reverence, the controller of the affairs of this life, the active agent in the fortunes of the human race.

(3) And lastly, *mulungu* as expressing the great spirit agency, the creator of the world and all life, the source of all things animate and inanimate.

And yet between these three conceptions of the spirit nature no definite boundary line can be drawn. The distinction in the native mind is ever of the haziest. No one will give you a dogmatic statement of his belief on such points.

It is only through long association with them in their daily life noting actual expressions of opinion or hearing of definite acts in relation to their worship or their dead, that one can get behind the reserve with which every Yao man or woman approaches or alludes to the spirit world which lies beyond and after this.

643 782 fice to the ancestors. The other public occasion was at initiation ceremonies. A successful initiation, i.e. one in which the initiates were not beset by misfortune, depended upon the goodwill of the ancestors of the chief. Initiates therefore gathered at the chief's court-village before the initiation, when the sanction of the spirits was asked and the initiates severally blessed. After this they scattered to the bush-schools near their villages only to return when initiation was completed and the chief received them into tribal society.

643 769 The people who had submitted themselves, willingly or unwillingly, to the rule of a chief, in turn expected certain services from him. He provided them, as we saw, with mystical protection through his ancestors. On a more pragmatic plane he was able to arm and co-ordinate military forces thereby giving his people protection from attack. Within his area of rule he was a common person of final appeal in the regulation of relationships of his subjects.

In these various ways, by propitiating his ancestor's spirits on behalf of his subjects, by settling differences between subjects, by co-ordinating defence and in fact by being a unique personality in the area, the chief became the symbol of unity of his tribal group. The symbolism was clearly noticeable on the death of a chief when a short period of social disorganization called *cipimbe* followed. The members of the chief's village were allowed to pillage and to commit rape and other criminal acts without suffering legal action. The demise of the symbol of unity was followed by a period of disunity before the appointment of a successor restored the *status quo*.

622 [769] At the same time much of what has been said about the chief was true also of important village headmen. Village headmen also made sacrifices to their ancestors but only in domestic or village affairs. They too built up their prestige by slaving. Many villages in Southern Nyasaland to-day

10: Sanderson D-5 (ca. 1920)1922 FT7 Yao FT7

THE WHOLE VILLAGE IS THOROUGHLY 'SPRING-CLEANED', ALL RUBBISH

(364) is swept up, the ground round the houses is hoed clean, and the interiors remodelled. Ceremonial beer is brewed by the head-wife of the chief, and after this has been drunk the ashes of the fire used in the brewing are carefully collected and taken to a malekano ("cross-roads," or "diverging of paths") where they are deposited.

(763) The chief, as representative of his people, bathes in special medicated water, a
(624) decoction made from the bark of ng'ungu and mkoma, and the root of ngungu.
(622) This completes the ordinary annual ceremony, at which new fire is not made.

On certain special occasions a more elaborate ritual is carried out; such occasions are the death of a chief, a threatened epidemic of infectious disease, a murder (especially by shooting) and the frequent occurrence of quarrels in the village.

In such circumstances, in addition to the ordinary pyajila ceremony described above, the partridge sticks of the whole village are renewed and all fires extinguished. The discarded sticks and all ashes of the old fires are carried to the meeting of paths, where the former are stuck upright in the ground and the ashes piled together; (372) this is done in procession, all the people taking part. On their return to the village new fire is made by friction by either the chief or his younger brother—usually the latter; fire procured in any other way would nullify the proceedings. Finally (763) all the people bathe in the medicated water used only by the chief at the ordinary ceremony.

951 In addition to this special form of the pyajila ceremony, another rite is sometimes
796 performed after the occurrence of a murder or as prophylactic against the spread of epidemic disease. The doctor first makes a kind of trough (lukungwe) from the bark of mtondwondo or mpepe, and procures a chichilako (or chipengule) basket—used as a strainer in salt-making. Having collected his medicines he proceeds to the bank of the stream near the usual bathing-place of the village and digs a shallow hole, in which he places the basket; in this he puts the leaves of a certain thorny shrub and covers the whole with the trough, which is banked up with earth so as to be perfectly firm. He then puts his "medicines" into the trough; these are, first, the head of an iron hammer and a piece of slag, both from a smelting furnace. On top of these he puts pieces of the root of a certain tree which has many and particularly sharp thorns, and bits of bark from two trees peculiar for having very straight stems. *Having distributed these evenly along the floor of the trough, he fills* it with water and then proceeds to construct an arch over the end of the trough farthest from the stream. Two long poles, cut from a kind of tree particularly rich in sap, are planted in the ground, one at each side of the trough and close to it; these are bent over towards each other, and fastened together by means of a strip of their own bark. A bamboo is now planted alongside each, and similarly tied to its fellow. During all these preparations and throughout the ceremony it is essential that the doctor tie no knots in any part of his clothing.

The preparations are now complete, and when all the fires in the village have been extinguished the people go in procession to the spot where the doctor awaits them. All must be purely clad and must have no metal about them.

(622) The chief opens the ceremony. He steps into the trough and taking some of the medicated water therefrom in his hands he rinses his mouth with it. He then
● (761) offers a prayer to the spirits of his ancestors, first stating the emergency and detailing the measures which are to be taken to deal with it (new fires, sweeping, discard of partridge-sticks and shaving). The prayer over, he splashes the water in the trough over his body and passes through the arch, first throwing some gifts (beads or, in more modern times, money) into the trough. These gifts, presumably intended as an offering to the spirits, are the perquisites of the doctor, and everybody is supposed to contribute in turn.

(764)